

I would like to thank Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Forbes for the opportunity to speak today about my bill, H.R. 367, the Gang Elimination Act.

Gangs are an increasing threat to the safety and quality of life of our towns and communities. What was once a problem assigned to large cities has now spread to suburbia and communities of all sizes across the nation – leaving no region untouched. There are currently over 25,000 gangs who are active in more than 3,000 jurisdictions across the U.S. The FBI and Department of Justice estimate that there are somewhere between 750,000 – 850,000 gang members in our nation. To put this number in context, it is larger than all but six armies in the world.

To make matters worse, the average recruit into a gang is in the seventh grade. In July, the Boston Globe reported on the allure gangs hold for preteens,

particularly those with an older sibling in a gang. The article details how young elementary and middle school aged boys and girls mimic their older counterparts by forming “crews” which they later abandon to join a bona fide gang, but not before enduring brutal hazing routines that include beatings until they bleed – which is called “jumping in.” And just last month the New York Times reported on gang violence that erupted at a Salisbury, NC high school dance that left an innocent 13-year old girl dead.

The influence of gangs reaches beyond our own communities. Gangs have become increasingly sophisticated in their tactics and work with crime organizations across the globe to channel drugs and guns into the country and onto our streets. Drug gangs are now the primary distributor of illegal narcotics in the United States. These “international drug cartels” now number in the thousands, across city, state, and national boundaries. Some gangs

collect millions of dollars per month selling illegal drugs, trafficking weapons, operating prostitution rings, and selling stolen property. These gangs are also directly linked with human trafficking, ID theft and fraud, violent maiming, assault and murder. In 2001, there were over 631 gang related homicides in the U.S.

Unfortunately, many police departments are not prepared for this growing threat. Across the nation, gang statistics are maintained sporadically at best. Our local law enforcement officials who are on the front line of this battle cannot win the war if they don't have a clear understanding of what they're up against. My bill, H.R. 367, the Gang Elimination Act would require the Attorney General to develop a National Strategy to eliminate the gang epidemic plaguing our neighborhoods. Specifically, this legislation will identify and target the three international drug gangs that present the greatest

threat to the United States, measuring their ties to terrorist organizations, the amount of drugs they import and distribute and the threat they pose to our children. In essence H.R. 367 creates a "Gang Most Wanted List." With this list, we will be able to identify their members and aggressively pursue them.

Gangs, be on notice.

Again, I would like to express my gratitude to the committee for their work to address the growing incidence of gang related crimes and find real solutions that will enable our local law enforcement agencies to eradicate gangs from our communities and keep our children safe. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on my bill and hope the committee will consider it.